

# Readers Cast Light on Monitor Roof, Lava Blocks



Today we interrupt the Marshfield wanderings to turn back briefly to Duxbury . . . and to contributions from Globe readers answering questions that have been raised and adding their own interesting stories.

A week ago I spoke of the roof-treatment of a white mansion in Duxbury's Washington st. and had wondered about its proper architectural name.

"This feature is known as the 'monitor roof,'" writes silver-smith David Longhi of Plymouth.

"It is not at all uncommon in this area. Do you recall the Bittinger mansion on Route 3? (I surely do; read on!)

"I think the Edward Winslow mansion in Plymouth, facing Cole's Hill, is the finest example of the style, with the Delano house in Kingston, next to Leland's Restaurant, almost as good.

"Both these houses have two sets of balustras, one at the usual eave, and one on top of the monitor, which may have caused you to overlook the peculiarity."

In John Everett Chandler's "The Colonial House," to which Mr. Longhi referred me, the distinguished authority on early American architecture speaks of the "monitor" as a style used "notably in the Old Colony and around Bristol, R. I."

It was evolved as a means of illuminating and ventilating the attic (which was sometimes used for bedrooms) "without the detriment of dormers with their possibility of leaking valleys." Thus

came the monitor and its little clerestory windows.

Now I had seen all the houses Mr. Longhi mentions — had walked past them, in fact — yet had not given any special attention to their roofs. The balustrades may have had something to do with it.

The two monitor-roofed houses I did notice were without the decorative touch — as the Winslow mansion evidently was around 40 years ago, when Mr. Chandler's book was published. So I'm wondering if their presence now represents a true restoration or a mere embellishment.

There are other such roofs, as Mr. Longhi suggests — and not all in the old Plymouth Colony territory.

"Your article in the Sunday (March 7) Globe was read with much interest," writes Mrs. J. A. Boland of Melrose, "especially your report of the Duxbury house with a 'something' on the roof. You asked, 'Can there be another?'

"Yes, there is. I saw it an hour after reading your article, as I was driving through Billerica! Right there in the center, on the left driving past the Common on the way from Boston.

"It is much the same, with more windows in the 'something' (i.e. the monitor) than the Duxbury house has. The Billerica house has a brick front facing the street. It's beautiful."

The Bittinger house in Duxbury I had not only seen, but had given special mention. It is the Summer residence of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bittinger of Washington, D. C., he a distinguished artist, and was originally the mansion of a Capt Gamaliel Bradford. It is in Tremont st., or Route 3A.

I speak of it again because of what follows — part of a letter from Miss Mary W. Boody of Brookline.

"For 56 years I have owned the big house behind the high hedge just north of the Bittingers," she writes.

"At the entrance is the oldest schoolhouse in Duxbury. We have still kept the teacher's desk with a narrow seat nailed to the wall back of it. Very uncomfortable those teachers must have been.

"At the time of the Tercentenary in Duxbury they asked permission to put up a stone, as the first schoolhouse was here. They did not know the exact location, so they put it up in front of the little school. It looks like a tombstone, so we did not want

*Afoot on the South Shore  
With Willard de Lue — XI*



"MONITOR ROOF" IS THE NAME FOR IT

it right in front of the house. "Several children have said to me, 'Who is dead there?'

"Many tourists seeing the stone think our little old school was the original and take pictures of it. We found an old map of the United States which hangs on the wall, showing the United States to the Mississippi River, beyond it the Missouri Territory, and vaguely Mexico. Geography was easy in those days.

"Mrs. Bittinger was a great friend of my sister in college and used to visit us about 1899-1900. At that time the old (Bradford) house was in bad condition as tramps had broken in. We also used to climb in a cellar window. Mrs. Bittinger was entranced with it.

"She went to France to study music, and married there. They came back about 1910 and came to visit us. As they drove over from Kingston she said to her husband 'That is the one house in

the world I would like to own.

"In 1914 on the death of Commodore Moore, they bought it. Fifteen years and her dream came true."

Across from the Bittinger place is another Bradford house that was mentioned—the Gershom Bradford house, with a tiny figurine set up over its front door.

Miss Boody mentioned that house, too, saying that if I had looked at the walk at the front door I'd have found it made of blocks of lava "brought home as ballast in one of Duxbury's many ships."

And now here's a note from one of the Bradfords—E. W. Bradford of Providence—in which the lava blocks again appear.

"For some time I have been reading the articles, starting with 'Afoot in Thanksgiving Land.' My interest rose to a climax on your description of my home; and my desire to thank you for your com-

plimentary remarks is the inspiration of this letter.

"The little figurine [which I thought might be a dog or sheep] is a lion, but has been so much weathered by time that it is hard to distinguish its characteristics. When I was a little boy and first became acquainted with the house more than 60 years ago, the little lion was there then, and had been there so long that nobody seemed to remember when it was put there, or whence it came. Probably it was brought by Capt Bradford on one of his voyages to foreign countries.

"My only regret is that you could not have chanced along when I was in residence, and then you would have seen the giant shells that customarily flank the front door. Capt Bradford brought them from the Pacific. There have been depredations around the town in recent years, and only a few weeks ago my neighbor next to Mr. Bittinger's on the north side of the road [can this be Miss Boody?] and just beyond where you turned off on Harrison st., lost a gilt weather cock which had adorned her barn ever since I could remember. Fear of these depredations cause me to put the shells inside when I am not in Duxbury, as they could easily be carried off.

"Then I would have loved to show you the stones in the front walk which my grandfather brought from Mt. Aetna."

NEXT—Green Harbor, Brant Rock, and the Battle of the Dike.